

HM CPSI overall performance assessment of CPS South Wales

HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HM CPSI) has today published the overall performance assessment (OPA) of CPS South Wales (the Area).

The OPA process provides a benchmark for each CPS Area's performance in 13 key aspects of work, each of which is assessed as being 'Excellent', 'Good', 'Fair' or 'Poor'. The Area is then assessed on its overall performance in the light of these markings.

The overall performance assessment of CPS South Wales was Fair.

The table below provides a breakdown of the assessed level of performance against the 13 aspects and provides a comparison with the 2005 exercise:

Critical aspects	Assessment level		
	OPA 2005	OPA 2007	Direction of travel
Pre-charge decision-making	Fair	Poor	Declined
Ensuring successful outcomes in the magistrates' courts	Good	Fair	Stable ¹
Ensuring successful outcomes in the Crown Court	Good	Good	Stable
The service to victims and witnesses	Good	Good	Stable
Leadership	Fair	Fair	Stable
Overall critical assessment level		FAIR	
Progressing cases at court	Good	Good	Stable
Sensitive cases and hate crime	Good	Good	Stable
Disclosure	Poor	Poor	Improved ²
Custody time limits	Fair	Fair	Improved ²
Delivering change	Fair	Fair	Stable
Managing resources	Good	Good	Stable
Managing performance to improve	Fair	Fair	Stable
Securing community confidence	Good	Good	Improved ²
OVERALL ASSESSMENT	Fair	FAIR	

1 The direction of travel reflects the fact that outcomes in magistrates' courts cases and the handling of those cases were assessed separately at the time of the last OPA.

2 Although the assessment for this aspect remains unchanged there has been significant improvement within the range of performance covered by the band.

Some aspects have been categorised as critical; this is due to the significant impact that they have on the overall performance of a CPS Area and the service it delivers to the public.

CPS South Wales has improved its level of performance in three aspects since the last overall performance assessment in 2005, although compliance with the prosecution's obligations of disclosure in relation to unused material remains poor and requires further improvement. The Area has also regressed in terms of operation of the statutory charging scheme under which the CPS has assumed responsibility for the initial decision whether to charge in relation to the more serious and contested cases. It has been difficult to get the scheme accepted as core business and action must be taken to improve this.

There is mixed performance in relation to casework across the three divisions, with the conviction rate in the magistrates' courts (81.4%) being rather less than the national average (84.3%) whilst the rate in the Crown Court (79.3%) better the national average (77.7%).

Crown Court cases are handled well and generally progress through the system satisfactorily. Performance in magistrates' courts cases is less good, but once cases enter the court system they usually progress in a timely manner. This timeliness may be attributed to the declining caseload whilst the reduction of court sittings has been limited and effective case progression is being achieved at the expense of real efficiency savings.

The introduction of Witness Care Units with the police has been successful and enables the Area to deliver a good service to victims and witnesses.

The handling of sensitive cases and hate crime is sound and has produced some very good results, as has some of the joint work supporting the three Specialist Domestic Violence Courts.

There is considerable autonomy at divisional level that has resulted in different systems, processes and outcomes, and the lack of strategic and Area-wide approaches has impacted on the implementation of national initiatives aimed at improving the effectiveness of the criminal justice system and service delivery. The Area has, however, worked hard with its criminal justice partners in preparation for implementation of the Criminal Justice: Simple, Speedy, Summary initiative.

The Area needs to ensure that it has the capacity to deliver further improvements through a corporate and consistent approach across all three divisions, more robust management of projects and performance, and by ensuring effective partnerships with other agencies.

Stephen Wooler CB, HM Chief Inspector, said:

"CPS South Wales achieves an overall satisfactory level of casework although the outcomes are mixed. It provides a good service to victims and witnesses. However, improvement is needed in a number of respects and a clearer corporate message about the future strategy and direction for the Area is necessary to give a lead to all managers to achieve this."

The Inspectorate is visiting all 42 CPS Areas over a six month period in order to provide a benchmark from which future work can be informed. A summative report will be published in early 2008 which will set out on a comparative basis the assessments for all the Areas. The outcomes of these assessments will be used to determine where best to focus Inspectorate resources in order to promote improvement within the CPS and the criminal justice system as a whole. It is also hoped that the Areas, and CPS Headquarters, will use this information to address issues at local and national level where this is necessary.

This Press Release should be read in conjunction with the Report itself (which contains an integral summary) and is available on our website at www.hmcpai.gov.uk.

For further information, please contact Andreas Harding, HMCPSI Communications Manager, on 020 7210 1143 or 07901 856 346.

Notes to Editors

HMCPSI was established as an independent statutory body on 1 October 2000 by the Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate Act 2000. The Chief Inspector is appointed by, and reports to, the Attorney General.

The OPA report is based on judgements that have been made by HMCPSI using a combination of absolute and comparative assessments of performance. These came from national data, CPS self-assessment, HMCPSI findings and by measurement under the criteria and indicators of good performance set out in the OPA framework. The exercise will include visits to all 42 CPS Areas over a six month period, between June-December 2007. Each Area is rated 'Excellent', 'Good', 'Fair' or 'Poor'.

The Inspectorate uses an assessment model which is designed to give pre-eminence to the ratings for 'critical' aspects of work as drivers for the final overall performance level. Assessments for the critical aspects are overlaid by ratings in relation to the other defining ones, in order to arrive at the OPA. This assessment model is included in the framework and is available to all Areas.

This exercise is not a full inspection and differs from traditional inspection activity. While it is designed to set out comprehensively the positive aspects of performance and those requiring improvement, it intentionally avoids being a detailed analysis of the processes underpinning performance. However, it is designed to provide a benchmark from which future work can be informed.

CPS South Wales serves the area covered by the South Wales Police. Its main office is based at Cardiff. In the year ended March 2007 it employed 223.1 full-time equivalent staff, and handled 28,794 cases before the magistrates' courts and 3,396 in the Crown Court. Advice was given to the police in 7,964 cases which did not result in proceedings.

This Press Release and the Report in relation to CPS South Wales are part of a block of ten reports published today. HMCPSI will publish two further tranches of reports covering the remaining 20 Areas.